

paid advertisement

Confessions of a Corp

I am a spy. A corporate spy to be more precise. Businesses pay me to gather information for them.

The images most people have of spies:

- a spy that gets information secretly, often using questionable or outright illegal acts, and,
- that of a Hollywood romanticized secret government agent jet setting around the world.

Neither of these descriptions is accurate when you take a close look at what I do. I'm having the time of my life.

If you knew me personally, you would find a true Clark Kent, not a Superman. In fact, all of my colleagues are everyday people probably just like you.

We have our regular jobs, some work from home, others are home-makers. There are over 200,000 of us coast-to-coast.

Far from being a clandestine undercover espionage agent, we provide a much needed service.

Think back to the last time you were either treated rudely, or, treated royally while you were shopping, at a bank, at the movies, in a restaurant, or in a convenience store. Let's look at your options. You could:

- Report your treatment to the manager.
- Write a letter to a consumer agency.
- Write a letter to the company's president.
- Vow never to shop at this establishment again, or, in if you were treated royally, you may recommend the business to friends should the occasion arise.
- Fill-out a 'counter-card' that's often near the cash register asking for your shopping experience.

Businesses want to weed out poor performing employees, improve their image, and reward employees who go the extra mile to help their customers.

The single most important asset to any business is its customers. Nothing supersedes customer service. Customers are the life-blood of a business. The most successful and best managed companies go to extreme steps to keep their customers happy.

Businesses know that it's a lot less expensive to keep an existing customer than it is to find new customers. One industry specific report estimates the cost to a company to get a new customer at \$625. The cost to keep an existing customer was less than \$20. It makes sense for business executives to work very hard to keep their customer base.

In today's shopping world consumers have many choices as to where they spend their hard earned money. Competition is fierce.

My work as a corporate spy is to report to the top executives in the company information about their own company! My colleagues and I are their only reliable source of this data. They call it 'information from the firing line'. Before you raise your eyebrows at the term 'firing line', understand that this is simply a business designation of activities that occur directly between employees and consumers.

In addition to competitive and attrition (keeping customers shopping at their respective stores), businesses face a myriad of corporate and regulatory procedures that they are required to follow to the letter. These 'compliance' issues include not selling alcohol or cigarettes to minors, treating all customers professionally regardless of race or sex, following guidelines in all regulated businesses (insurance, real estate, banking, etc.).

Failure to comply with these ever changing regulations will land a business in civil court or worse costing millions, perhaps billions, of dollars. As a corporate spy, I can help companies avoid these huge costs.

Employee integrity is an area in which corporate spies help companies. This is especially true in the bar and restaurant fields. I get paid to dine out



Bill Thompson - Corporate Spy

and drink all the while watching to see if the money goes into the register and free drinks aren't being served.

Product placement requires me to check displays at large retail stores. Are the shelves properly stocked? Is the inventory clean? Is it priced correctly?

To get real and factual information, businesses hire spies to get this information about their own retail outlets. These 'spies' are independent contractors. They do not work directly for the business. This allows me to select which assignments I want and when I want to work.

This business is called Mystery Shopping. It's a multi-billion dollar industry. I've heard that over 50% of the assignments never get done because there are too few mystery shoppers available.

Having a regular job, I do my mystery shopping part-time. Some very simple assignments take only a few minutes and pay around \$20. A recent more complicated assignment paid me over \$1,000. Most of my assignments pay in the \$50 per 'shop' range.

The assignments that are a real blast are the cruise 'shops'. They send me on a week or 10 day cruise

